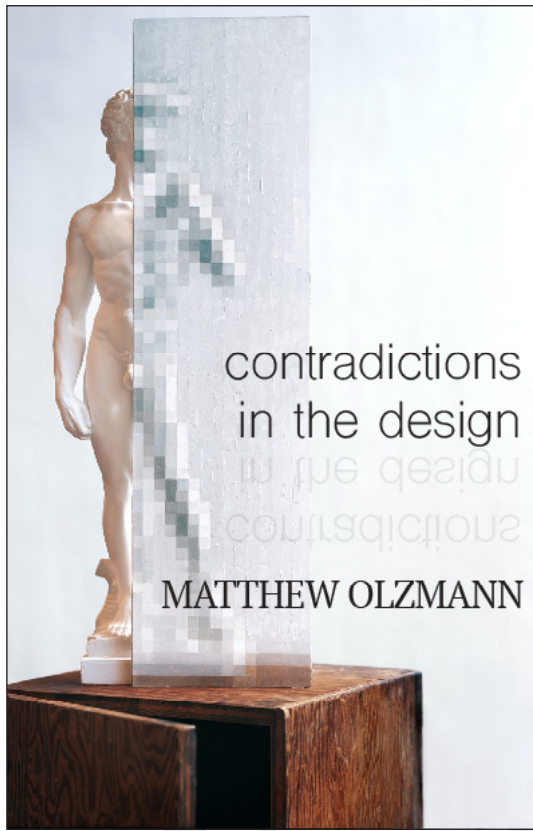


Contradictions in the Design

Matthew Olzmann



These political poems employ humor to challenge the cultural norms of American society, focusing primarily on racism, social injustices and inequality. Simultaneously, the poems take on a deeper, personal level as it carefully deconstructs identity and the human experience, piecing them together with unflinching logic and wit. Olzmann takes readers on a surreal exploration of discovery and self-evaluation.

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Praise for Contradictions in the Design:

“Contradictions in the Design is a firehouse of a book—heaven-bent and relieved toward elemental mysteries that it resists and celebrates. Telegraphing the factories of Detroit, our familiar and strange American homes, the vast Blue Ridge, Olzmann guides us toward a hard-earned gratefulness that can exist when in the presence of impossible questions. We are not given easy answers but lucid and heartbreaking portraits of a brave conscientiousness. Olzmann is the one to watch.”

—Sarah Gambito

Alice James Books

114 Prescott Street • Farmington, ME • 04938

(207) 778-7071

www.alicejamesbooks.org



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A poem from Contradictions in the Design:

ELEGY IN WHICH I'M UNABLE TO TRAVEL FASTER THAN THE SPEED OF SOUND

When I saw his body—which was no longer
his body, but something else, a replica
of his body, an artist's rendering of his
body, a replacement body, something
made of wax and hair and human tissue
and shaped to look almost identical
to the way I remember him—the air
left my lungs as if I was a balloon
and grief was a slow needle held
by an invisible hand. I don't know
where that air goes. I don't know
if it stayed in the room to be breathed
in by others, to be absorbed by their
quick blood, to be rushed through arteries
and to later supply their brains with oxygen.
If so, what sad thoughts might they have thought
in the moment that oxygen found them?
Pain moves through the body at a rate
of three hundred fifty feet per second.
This means pain travels fast, but not as fast
as sound. This means, when someone speaks,
pain is slower than that language. If someone
would have said, "Please," or "Help,"
those words would have made it to the other side
of the room, or through the door, before
the feeling—inside your clenched fist—
of your fingernails
drawing blood from your palm
registered in your brain. But I don't remember
anyone saying anything like that.
I don't remember anyone speaking.



NEED PHOTO CREDIT

Matthew Olzmann's first book of poems, *Mezzanines*, received the 2011 Kundiman Prize and was published by Alice James Books. His writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *New England Review*, *Kenyon Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, *The Southern Review*, *Forklift*, *Ohio* and elsewhere. Currently, he is a Visiting Professor of Creative Writing in the undergraduate writing program at Warren Wilson College and co-editor of *The Collagist*.

Publicity and Events
